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AUGUSTINE ON THE MIND'S SEARCH FOR ITSELF

Gareth B. Matthews

In *De trinitate* X Augustine seeks to discover the nature of mind (*mens*). As if recalling Plato's Paradox of Inquiry, he wonders how such a search can be coherently understood. Rejecting the idea that the mind knows itself only indirectly, or partially, or by description, he insists that nothing is so present to the mind as itself. Yet it is open to the mind to perfect its knowledge of itself by coming to realize that its nature is to be only what it is certain that it is.

Augustine may never have read Plato's dialogue, *Meno*. We can't be sure. He certainly knew *about* the dialogue. Specifically, he knew of the episode in which Socrates questions the slave boy about how to construct a square with an area twice that of a given square. But he may have gotten the slave-boy story from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (1.24.57). Perhaps he never actually read Plato's dialogue itself and, in particular, never read the brief passage in which first Meno, and then Socrates, states the Paradox of Inquiry. (*Meno* 80de)

Nevertheless, the Paradox of Inquiry, however Augustine may have come to think about it, engaged his mind in deep, fundamental, and persisting ways. We can see this, for example, at the very beginning of his *Confessions*, where he puzzles over whether one can pray that one may come to know God.¹ Plato's Meno had been puzzled about how one could aim one's search for the nature of virtue, or even recognize that nature if one should happen to stumble across it, if one didn't already know the nature of virtue. Similarly, Augustine asks how one know which being to address one's prayer to, unless one already knows God.

We might think it only an idle worry that a seeker after God could actually pray to the wrong being for help in the search for God — either by praying to a completely unreal being or, perhaps, by praying to a diabolical being instead of the good being one had hoped to make contact with. But we should remember that Augustine himself had been a Manichean learner not many years before he admitted to this puzzlement. After his conversion to Christianity he must have viewed his earlier Manichean prayers as misdirected entreaties of the very sort that he brings up at the beginning of the *Confessions*.

Although I think it would be interesting and worthwhile to tease out the exact form this theological version of the Paradox of Inquiry takes, and the significance it has for Augustine, what I want to focus on in this paper is a



much more extensive discussion of the paradox than anything we can find anywhere in the *Confessions*. It is the discussion in Book X of Augustine's *De trinitate*. That discussion is, to my knowledge, the fullest response to the Paradox of Inquiry to be found in all of ancient and medieval philosophy.

It is the Paradox of Inquiry, in fact, that gives structure to Book X of the *De trinitate*. Given its central importance to the book, it is surprising that Augustine never actually states the Paradox of Inquiry in Book X, at least not in any straightforward way. His stated project in that book is rather to continue the effort to understand the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, the idea that God is three-in-one. In Book X specifically he tries to illuminate the Doctrine of the Trinity by finding an analogy to it in the human mind. But before he can do that, he needs to say something about the mind – about what a mind is, about how one has knowledge of one's mind and knows that it is, in fact, a mind. Augustine thinks that even before he can do that he needs to discuss inquiry more generally.

So Augustine begins Book X of the *De trinitate* by stating a rather intriguing principle. "No one," he writes, "can in any way love a thing that is wholly unknown,"² (*rem prorsus ignoratam amare omnino nullus potest* – DT 10.1.1) We are not told at first how this principle, which I shall the *Knowledge Requirement for Love*, will be relevant to the discussion to follow. But we are not kept in suspense for very long. Augustine directs our attention to the love of students who, by virtue of being only students, lack the knowledge they are seeking and thus, by the Knowledge Requirement, cannot love it. Being unable to love the object of their inquiry, these students cannot be motivated in their inquiry by a love of that which they want to know. Being unmotivated, they won't inquire. But being students, they do. So here we have a somewhat augmented version of Plato's Paradox of Inquiry. If we were to make explicit the version of the paradox that Augustine puts in play here, we might come up with this:

Motivational Paradox of Inquiry (MPI)

Consider some inquirer, S, and some object of inquiry, O.

1. S won't search for O unless S loves O. (Motivational Assumption)
2. S can't love O unless S already knows O. (Knowledge Requirement)
3. If S already knows O, then S can't search for O. [because S does not lack knowledge of O].
4. Either S already knows O or S doesn't already know O. (tautology)
5. If S doesn't already know O, then S can't love O. (2, transposition)
6. If S doesn't love O, then S won't search for O. (1, transposition)
7. If S doesn't already know O, then S won't search for O, (5, 6, h.s.)
8. Either S can't search for O or S won't search for O. (3, 4, 7, c.d.)

We should admit right away that the Motivational Paradox of Inquiry (MPI), as I have reconstructed it here, is far too simplistic to capture the structure of real inquiry, at least for very many of the cases of inquiry that

we are likely to be interested in. As we shall see, it is a major burden of Augustine's discussion to bring out how much more complex, and how much more interesting, real cases of inquiry are than the MPI might lead us to suppose.

Perhaps the structure of the MPI, as I have schematized it, most naturally fits cases of inquiry relevantly like searching for a missing person. But even in such a case there are problems. My younger brother, as a four-year-old, went with his best friend on a totally unauthorized, but partly for that reason quite exciting, expedition into the woods. Various family members, friends, and other concerned citizens of our town soon formed search parties to look for the two children. Even the local "civil air patrol" got into the act. Certainly the searchers were highly motivated to conduct their search. For some of them that motivation did indeed arise from a love for my brother, or for his friend. Yet there were many searchers, the pilot of the search plane, for example, who could hardly be said to have loved my brother or his friend, whom they had never even heard of before. The searchers are thus counterexamples to the Motivational Assumption. As we shall see, Augustine himself recognizes this sort of objection in his discussion of the MPI.

There is, however, another sort of objection to the Motivational Assumption that needs to be addressed. Suppose that, instead of there being a search for two relatively innocent little boys, there had been a search for escaped convicts. In that case it would be quite inappropriate to speak of *love* for the object of search, not just because the searchers, we may suppose, had not even heard of the convicts before, but also because they would be more likely to be motivated in their search by fear than by love. Although Augustine does not discuss this kind of case, we can imagine that he might respond by saying that, although he had meant to be focusing on positive searches, rather than negative ones, it would do no serious harm to the major points he wants to make to weaken the Motivational Assumption to something more like this:

- 1.* S won't search for O unless S in some way cares about O.

Let's suppose for present purposes that such a response would be satisfactory and turn our attention to another sort of objection. Whatever exactly the motivating attitude of the searchers for my little brother might have been – whether it was love or fear or something else — the searchers needn't have known my brother to have had that attitude toward him. Nor need they have known him or his friend to be able to search for them. A general description of at least one of the two boys, or perhaps a picture, would have served quite well to target the search. This consideration brings us back to Augustine's own discussion. Augustine devotes the first four sections of *De trinitate* X to considering a variety of cases in which one could be said to care enough about the object of inquiry to search for it, even though one could not be said to know it, at least in any strong sense of 'know.'

The first kind of case Augustine brings up is one in which some student already knows the beauties of bodies generally from having seen many of

them. Incited by the reputation for beauty of an as yet unseen body, the student longs to find it. In this case, Augustine says, because the *genus* of the thing sought is already known, love is aroused for “a thing not entirely unknown” (*non rei penitus incognitae amor excitatur* – 10.1.1). In honor of my wife, who is an ardent birdwatcher, I propose to call the model of inquiry Augustine suggests with this first example the *Birder Model*. When my wife goes out to look for birds in a new location she may want to add a bird species or variety to her “life list.” That is, she may hope to see a *kind* of bird she has never seen before. She already knows the genus,³ bird, very well. In fact she knows many species, subspecies, and varieties of that genus and loves them with a great and tender affection. Maybe she has heard that there were birds of some, to her, completely unfamiliar species in this new location. Her love of the genus leads her to seek the new species.

Alternatively, my wife might simply want to make up a day list, that is, see individuals of some of the species that are already familiar to her. No doubt the individual birds she sees will be individuals she has never seen before; but the type will be familiar and well loved.

A few lines later in *De trinitate* X Augustine suggests a second model of inquiry. His example this time is learning how to write. He imagines someone who has never before realized that it is possible to communicate one’s thoughts to a distant recipient by writing them down and sending the written message to the distant party. The inquirer will be motivated to learn, Augustine supposes, not by loving the skill of writing, which is still unknown to him, but by loving the purpose or end. The model of inquiry that lies behind this example is something we could call the *Teleological Model*. One knows and loves the end or purpose to be served. One seeks to learn and master a skill that will fulfill or serve that end or purpose.

In the next section Augustine imagines someone coming across a new word. Augustine’s example is *temetum*, which means ‘wine.’ Augustine imagines that one might recognize that *temetum* is a sign, that is, a meaningful word, but not know its meaning, its *significatum*. Augustine describes this as a case in which the sign is known, but “not fully known” (*non plene notum est* – 10.1.2.42). The mind, he says, wants to know the rest (*quod reliquum est* – 10.1.2.43). A little later he says the mind wants to know the sign perfectly (*perfecte id nosse vult* – 10.1.2.47). I shall call the model of inquiry suggested here the *Perfection Model*. According to the Perfection Model of Inquiry one loves something one knows only imperfectly. By inquiry one seeks to know it more nearly perfectly.

A few lines later Augustine uses the Perfection Model in a grander way. He says that the soul may see in the light of truth how great and how good it is to understand and speak the languages of all peoples. The glory (*decus*) of such knowledge is seen in thought, he says. Motivated by the love of it, one seeks to perfect that knowledge in oneself. Learning the meaning of ‘temetum’ is thus a small step toward perfecting the art of communication, which one already knows and loves.

With these three models of inquiry in play – the Birder Model, the Teleological Model, and the Perfection Model – Augustine can assure us, at the beginning of DT 10.1.3, that the motivating love of “a mind that wants to know what it does not know, is not the love of the thing it does not

know, but rather the love of that which it does know, on account of which it wishes to know what it does not know." We can also put Augustine's point less paradoxically. In a way, perhaps, the mind does know and love what it seeks. On the Birder Model it knows the object of the search as either a new species of the already known and loved genus, or else as a new individual under an already known and loved species. On the Teleological Model the mind knows the object as whatever will serve the known and valued purpose or end. On the Perfection Model it knows the object directly, perhaps through the senses, perhaps in the light of truth; but it knows this object only imperfectly, or partially.

In Section 3 Augustine distinguishes between the merely curious person, the *curiosus*, and the *studiosus*, the genuine student. The *curiosus* is a collector of information. For someone like that amassing information is indiscriminate. Today such a person would count as a trivia buff. What motivates inquiry for such people is not the love of what is unknown; it is the love of knowing. And so this case falls under the Perfection Model. The *curiosus* knows and loves knowing and wants to know it more perfectly, that is, more completely.

In DT 10.2.4 Augustine describes yet another possibility. It is the case of someone hearing something praised who, from the description provided by the person praising it, forms an image of the object to be searched for. I shall call the model of inquiry suggested by these remarks the *Projection Model*. Augustine makes it clear that it is not the image itself that one knows and loves. For he allows that one may be disappointed when one encounters the actual person or thing one's image was supposed to represent. Thus, when those who had praised the object confirm that this thing before me is the very thing they had praised, on the basis of which I had made up my image, I may be disappointed to find that the object before me is not at all attractive in the way that the object I had projected was.

Each of these four models gives us a way of rejecting the Knowledge Requirement, or, perhaps better, weakening and qualifying it. Thus if the Knowledge Requirement is weakened to this, it is acceptable:

- 2.* S can't love O unless S knows O at least indirectly, or partially, or by description.

But then watering down the knowledge requirement to allow for partial, or indirect, knowledge, as well as for knowledge by description, forces us to transform something that indeed had the look of a truism, namely,

3. If S already knows O, then S can't search for O [because S does not lack knowledge of O]

into

- 3.* If S already knows O at least indirectly, or partially, or by description, then

S can't search for O [because S does not lack knowledge of O]

which, far from being a truism, is simply false. One can certainly lack knowledge of what one knows indirectly, or partially, or by description..

What Augustine's various models of inquiry bring out are thus some of the ways that indirect or partial knowledge, or mere knowledge by description, not only leaves something to search for, or inquire about, but also helps direct or aim the inquiry at its object.

If we turn back for a moment to the original Paradox of Inquiry in Plato's dialogue, *Meno*, we can recall that two reasons are offered there for saying that, if, for example, one doesn't know virtue, one can't search for it. One reason is what we might call the *Targeting Objection* ("How will you aim your search for something you do not know at all?" *Meno* 80d6-7); and the other is the *Recognition Objection* ("If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?" d7-8) The general description of the object of inquiry generated by each of the four models of inquiry presented by Augustine in DT 10 suggests a way of responding effectively to both the Targeting Objection and the Recognition Objection. The partial or indirect knowledge, or knowledge by description, that these models allow for may be sufficient both for aiming the search satisfactorily and for enabling the searcher to recognize the object, once it is encountered, as well.

* * *

Augustine next turns to see if the problem of motivated inquiry may be significantly different when what the mind desires is to know is itself. (*cum se ipsa mens nosse desiderat* 10.2.4) Only hinted at in the beginning of Augustine's discussion, but fully acknowledged later on, is the use Augustine wants to make of the admonition, 'Know thyself!' Augustine understands this command to be an admonition directed to the mind to know itself. Incidentally, Augustine doesn't ever say why 'Know thyself!' should be understood to be aimed at the mind in particular. But Cicero, in his first *Tusculan Disputation*, which Augustine must have had freshly in his mind when he wrote *De trinitate* X, does discuss the issue briefly. "For I do not believe," writes Cicero of the maxim, 'Know thyself!'

that it instructs us to know the members of our body, or our stature, or our shape; nor are we our bodies, nor do I, saying this to you, speak to your body. Thus when [Apollo] says, "Know yourself!" he means this: "Know your mind [*animus*]!" (1.22.52, trans. mine)

So Augustine's question now is, how can the mind be coherently supposed to want to know itself?

In tackling this issue Augustine first tries out the Projection Model. Perhaps, he suggests, it is not that the mind loves itself and wants to get to know itself, but rather, perhaps, what the mind loves is what it has formed an image of, which could be something quite different. (10.3.5.8) But where would it get the materials for this image of itself? Perhaps, Augustine suggests, the mind already has, from its knowledge of other minds, a generic image of mind and so already knows itself generically at least (*genere ipso*

sibi nota est — 10.3.5.11) The attentive reader of *De trinitate* will remember, however, that Augustine had already considered and rejected in Book VIII the idea that one might abstract a generic idea of mind by comparing several other minds and extracting what they have in common. He had rejected that idea in his discussion of the Argument from Analogy for Other Minds. There he had insisted that we cannot know other minds directly and so cannot compare them in such a way as to be able to form a generic image of them. Here, in Book X, he simply insists that, since “nothing could be more present to itself than itself” (10.3.5.13-14) the idea of using a generic image to recognize what one’s own mind is, is inappropriate.

He turns next to the Teleological Model. Perhaps, he suggests, the mind can see in the reason of eternal truth how beautiful it is to know itself and it seeks to realize that end. (10.3.5.18-21) Or, again, perhaps it sees some end that includes its own safety and beatitude and believes that it cannot achieve this end without self-knowledge. Or, and now he brings the figure of the *curiosus* and the Perfection Model of Inquiry into play, perhaps the mind just loves knowing, and knowing itself turns out to be one of the ways the mind can gain more nearly perfect knowledge.

So far Augustine has not found any of the models of inquiry he had developed earlier in the book helpful in understanding how the mind can direct its inquiry at itself. At this point he decides to short-circuit the review of models of inquiry he had developed in earlier sections. He does so by presenting reasoning for the conclusion that the mind, even in seeking to know itself, already knows itself.

I should say right away that the expression ‘knows itself’ in the phrase ‘the mind knows itself’ is not as clear as one could wish. To figure out what Augustine means by it we need to reflect on passages like this one:

However, [the mind] knows what knowing is. And, so long as it loves this thing that it knows [namely, what knowing is], it wants to know itself as well. In what place, then, does it know its own knowing, if it does not [even] know itself? For it knows that it knows other things, but [on the hypothesis we are considering] not that it knows itself. To be sure, it is on account of [knowing that it knows other things] that it also knows what knowing is. By what means, then, does the very thing that does not know itself [nevertheless] know itself knowing something? Nor [in this case] does it know another mind knowing [something], but it itself. Therefore, it knows it itself. (10.3.5.33-39)⁴

At least part of Augustine’s idea in this rather tortured bit of reasoning seems to be this. The mind knows that *it* knows something. The mind also recognizes that *its* knowing something is different from another mind’s knowing something. So the mind recognizes itself and realizes that it is different from other minds. I suggest, in fact, that what Augustine means by ‘the mind knows itself’ is that very thing, namely, *the mind recognizes itself and realizes that it is different from other minds*.

If I have put the right gloss on ‘the mind knows itself,’ then the principle Augustine might be said to be appealing to in the last quoted passage is this:

(P) For any x such that x is an F , if x knows that it knows something and knows that its knowing something is different from other F s knowing the same thing, then x knows itself, in the sense of recognizing itself and distinguishing itself from other F s.

Thus even before my mind seeks to know itself, it knows that it knows something, say, the 12-times table, and it knows that its knowing the 12-times table is different from another mind's knowing that very thing. Thus, by (P), before my mind seeks to know itself it already knows itself in the sense of at least recognizing itself and distinguishing itself from other minds.

Now we understand why Augustine decided to short-circuit the review of models of inquiry he had developed earlier. Instead of asking how it is possible to conduct a motivated search for what one only partially or indirectly knows, or knows only by description, Augustine is now interested in asking how it is possible to conduct a motivated search for what one already knows, in the sense of being able to recognize it and distinguish it from other members of its kind. Thus, the discussion so far has focused on ways of weakening or watering down the Knowledge Requirement sufficiently to make room for inquiry by making clear how (a) indirect or (b) partial knowledge, or (c) knowledge by description, could be used to aim or direct the inquiry and, at the same time, leave room for something to be gained by inquiry. When Augustine turns his attention to the case of the mind's searching for or seeking itself, however, he does *not* want to say that the mind knows itself only indirectly, or only by description.

Augustine certainly doesn't want to say that the mind has only indirect knowledge of itself. One of his mantras in this section of the *De trinitate*, as we shall see, is "Nothing is more present to the mind than itself." So it would be wrong to say that the mind has only indirect knowledge of itself and seeks to know itself directly.

He is not happy with saying that the mind knows itself only partially either. Here is a sample of his ruminations on that point:

And if [the mind] knows what it seeks, and seeks itself, it certainly knows itself. What then should it still seek? But if it knows itself in part, yet still seeks itself in part, then it does not seek itself, but [only] a part of itself. (DT 10.4.6)

Suppose the mind were made up, as Freud thought, of ego, superego and id. And suppose my mind knew only the part that is the ego. Then it would think of itself merely as ego. In seeking to know what it took to be itself, it would not really be seeking to know itself, but only part of itself, namely, its ego. That seems to be Augustine's worry when he rejects the idea that the mind that is inquiring into itself might begin with only partial knowledge of itself.

As you might already guess, Augustine also rejects the idea that the mind might know itself only by description. I'm going to say a little more about his rejection of that in a moment. But, for now, it will be enough to appeal to the aforementioned mantra, 'Nothing is more present to the

mind than itself,' as a way of discrediting the suggestion that the mind knows itself only by description.

Still, Augustine needs to make some "wiggle room" for the possible fruits of inquiry. That is, Augustine needs to understand how the knowledge that the mind has of itself is both *sufficient* to target successfully its inquiry into itself and also *limited* enough to give scope to the inquiry, that is, room for the mind to gain new knowledge about itself. Here is a passage in which Augustine seeks to identify the needed "wiggle room":

Let the mind, therefore, know itself, and not seek itself as though it were absent; let it fix the attention of its will, by which it formerly wandered over many things, upon itself, and think of itself. So it will see that there was never a time when it did not love itself, and never a time when it did not know itself; but because it loved another thing with itself, it has confused itself with this other thing, and has, in a certain way, grown together with it. And so while it embraces diverse things as though they were one, it came to regard as one, things that are diverse. (DT 10.8.11)

Augustine's suggestion is now that the mind, though it knows itself and is fully present to itself, has confused itself with something else. How can this happen? Augustine's idea seems to be that, by focusing all its attention on the sensory world, plus images of the sensory world, the mind comes to think of itself as something that could also be represented by a bodily image, and hence as something corporeal. "However, the mind errs," he writes,

when it so lovingly and intimately connects itself with these images, as even to consider itself to be something of the same kind [as the things those images represent]. For so it is conformed to them to some extent, . . . not by thinking itself to be an image, but that very thing itself of which it has an image. (10.6.8)

The difficulty, as Augustine sees it, lies in the fact that the mind tries to represent itself to itself, as though it were something distinct from itself. Instead of recognizing that it is nonrepresentationally present to itself, the mind gets so caught up in corporeal images that it tries to represent itself to itself in yet another corporeal image.

The central claim that dominates the discussion in this part of DT 10 is what I shall call the *Presence Principle*: Nothing is more present to the mind than the mind is present to itself. What does this mean? In particular, what does Augustine here mean by 'presence' (*praesens*)? One thing that 'present' means is 'not absent.' The mind, Augustine writes, is in no way *absent* to itself, or remote from itself. (DT 10.8.11) That seems to mean, for one thing, that the mind is fully available to itself. Thus, even if the mind hasn't considered properly what it itself is, or if, through the plausibility of the mistaken metaphysical principle that all substances are corporeal, it has confused itself about what it is, the mind is nevertheless totally available to itself for the self-identification of its substance or nature. It needs no information from "elsewhere," or from "outside" — from, for example, some experiment or from some outside expert or some recondite reasoning — to get clear about what it itself is. It needs only to reflect on what it finds itself to be.

To get a better grasp of what the Presence Principle means for Augustine we need to remind ourselves of the variety of ways individual things can, according to Augustine, be present to the mind:

1. A physical object can be present to my mind through the bodily senses. Thus when I see the tree in front of me, that tree is present to my mind through vision.
2. A physical object can be present to my mind through a representation of it in my mind. This kind of case divides into two:
 - a. Suppose I entertain a memory image of a tree I have seen.. Then the tree that is present to my mind through its image is the tree I have seen.
 - b. Alternatively, the image in my mind may be one I have made up to represent either something generic, say, a generic tree, or else a particular individual, say, a tree that I have not seen, but have had described to me.
3. The mind is present to itself, not through an image or other representation, but simply through itself.

When Augustine says that nothing is more present to the mind than the mind is to itself, part of what he wants to emphasize is that the mind is present to itself *immediately*, that is, without the mediation of anything else. Thus when I see a tree in front of me, the tree is present to my mind through the mediation of my sight. When I remember the tree I saw yesterday, that tree is present to my mind through the mediation of a memory image. When someone describes a tree to me that I have never seen, that tree becomes present to my mind through the mediation of an image the mind forms within itself on the basis of the description. But when I turn my attention to my own mind, my mind is present to itself without any mediation whatsoever – specifically, without the mediation of my senses and without the mediation of any mental image or other representation. The mind is thus present to itself *immediately* and *non-representationally*. Nothing, Augustine supposes, can be more present to the mind than something that is thus present to it immediately and non-representationally.

This idea that the mind is present to itself non-representationally plays a role in one of Augustine's arguments for saying that the mind is incorporeal. Suppose the mind were something corporeal, for example, suppose it were the brain. Then, for the mind to be able to think of itself it would have to be possible for the *brain* to be present to the mind nonrepresentationally. The mind would, as Augustine puts it,

think of this thing [that is, the brain] in a different way from [the way in which it thinks of] other [material] things, not, namely, through an image figment (*non scilicet per imaginale figmentum*), in the way that absent things touched by a sense of the body are brought to mind . . . not [just] by a mock-up (*simulata*) but rather by [its] inner presence. For there is nothing more present to [the mind] than itself. (DT 10.10.16)⁵

Yet there is no way, Augustine insists, that the brain or any other material thing can be present to the mind immediately and non-representationally, the way the mind can be present to itself. So the mind is not the brain, or anything material.⁶

The Presence Principle not only gives Augustine a way of arguing for the immateriality of the mind, it also gives him a way of understanding how the mind, though it already knows itself, can still seek itself. The mind's seeking itself can consist in the mind's redirecting its attention to itself and away from the things that have distracted it.

What can the mind hope to discover about itself, once it has directed its attention to itself and away from the physical objects that have distracted it? We might have expected Augustine to describe for us the contents of his own consciousness, or some introspected "innermost self." In fact, Augustine offers no introspective revelations.

Instead, what Augustine focuses on are things the mind cannot doubt about itself. The mind may have never stopped to consider these truths about itself. But once it considers them, it realizes that it cannot doubt them. Things that the mind cannot doubt about itself, according to Augustine, include these: that it lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges. "Yet who would doubt that he lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges?" Augustine asks rhetorically. The implication is clearly that no one can doubt these truths, not even one who supposes, mistakenly, that the mind is something material.

For even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts, he wishes to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows that he does not know; if he doubts he judges that he ought not to consent rashly. Whoever then doubts about anything else ought never to doubt about all of these; for if they were not, he would be unable to doubt about anything at all. (DT 10.10.14)

After telling us that the mind is certain of its own nature (*substantia*), Augustine adds, in a grand rhetorical flourish, that the mind "should be certain that it is none of the things about which it is uncertain, and it should be certain that it is that alone which alone it is certain that it is." (DT 10.10.16) Augustine's inquiry into the nature or substance of the mind thus yields this result:

(M) The mind is something whose nature it is to be only what it is certain that it is.

It is well to note that Augustine in his essential characterization of mind fails to include anything about the mind's being "transparent" to itself, in the familiar sense of its being necessarily aware of all its contents. Thus there is here nothing in *De trinitate* X comparable to this famous claim of Descartes: "As to the fact that there can be nothing in the mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, of which it is not aware, this seems to me to be self-evident."⁷ Descartes's idea seems to be that, if there is a pain or an appearance of redness in my mind, necessarily my mind is aware of it. We might have expected Augustine to make a similar claim, but he does not.

Moreover, Augustine's characterization of the mind as something that lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges – though otherwise quite similar to Descartes's – leaves out the last two items from Descartes's list, namely, "also imagines and has sensory perceptions."⁸ Why should this be so?

The mental functions Augustine appeals to, to characterize the nature of the mind are all features Augustine considers to be *immune to doubt by being themselves guaranteed by doubt*. Thus if one doubts, it follows that one lives (in at least the sense of surviving). Again, if one succeeds in doubting something, then one understands that one doubts, indeed, according to Augustine, understands what it is that one doubts. By contrast, if one doubts something, it does not follow that one has any sensory perceptions at all, or that one imagines anything at all. So having sense perceptions and imagining things does not belong essentially to that, as one might call it, "core self" Augustine calls "the mind." In this respect, Augustine's conception of the mind is a purer conception of a thinking thing than Descartes's. Imagining things and having sensory perceptions are, by implication, not essential but only accidental to the mind.

To make a little clearer what a mind is, according to Augustine, I want to develop a thought experiment. My thought experiment is inspired by⁹ this admonition from Augustine:

But since we are investigating the nature of the mind [*natura mentis*], let us not take into consideration any knowledge that is obtained from without through the senses of the body, and consider more attentively those things which we have laid down that all minds know and are certain of concerning them themselves. (DT 10.10.14)¹⁰

Here is the thought experiment. Suppose I am in a bad automobile accident, after which I seem to wake up in an odd state with little or no sensory input. I cannot see or hear anything. I seem to be paralyzed. I have only minimal kinesthetic sensations. Am I in a hospital recovering from the accident? Or have I, as I might suppose, survived death? In this immobilized state I might think of myself as an academic who once taught philosophy at UMass, as the husband of Mary Howorth, as the father of Sarah, Becca, and John. But, in my present state, whatever exactly it is, I might be mistaken about any or all of these descriptions without putting in jeopardy my claim to know that it is *I* who have come to consciousness. So who is this 'I' who has come to consciousness? Perhaps all I can be certain of concerning my identity is, in fact, that it's *me*. It is *I* who am alive, thank God – if not biologically alive, at least alive in the sense that goes with wondering whether there is life after death. In this sense I live, and, of course, I think, I know that I live and think, I want to know more about my condition and I know that I want that. I judge that I am conscious and know this as well. Do I really remember anything? I seem to. But of all the items on Augustine's list of certainties that the mind enjoys, remembering is, no doubt, the most questionable. Still, if we understand 'remember' in the weak sense of 'seem to remember,' there is no problem about including it as well.

The self-isolation portrayed in this thought experiment helps us pick

out, I think, the core self that Augustine in his *De trinitate* calls *mens*, "the mind." In the imagined circumstance this core self would be, in Augustine's expression, "present" to me without my needing to pick it out from other entities, and without my having to represent it to myself by either a mental picture or some definite description, such as, 'the husband of Mary Howorth.' I would be infallibly present to myself even if, for any such description I might come up with for myself, that description were, in fact, mistaken.

So understood, this mind is not, it can seem plausible to say, a brain, or anything material. That is, when I say, "Thank God I still exist," I need not mean to be expressing any gratitude for the functional preservation of my body, even my brain. It would be coherent for me to at least wonder whether I had survived my bodily death.

Could my mind function without its being embodied in some brain or other, or at least in some brainlike structure? I don't know. For all I know, I might have to have a brain. For all I know, the waking-up experience I have described in my thought experiment, though conceivable as an after-death experience without any physical basis in a human brain, is, in actuality, physically impossible.

Augustine, of course, accepted the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Although, on occasion, he expressed some puzzlement as to why we need a body in the afterlife, he, unlike, say, Descartes, seems to have had no philosophical or theological interest in trying to show that the core self, the mind, could actually function in a disembodied state. In proving, as he thinks he has done in *De trinitate* X, that the mind or inner self is nothing corporeal, he seems *not* to have thought of himself as proving that the mind could think without its having even a resurrection body.

Why might there be such a big difference as this between Augustine and Descartes? I think the answer is, first, that Augustine is not a foundationalist in epistemology. Thus, although he argues for his own existence in a *cogito*-like fashion as a response to global skepticism, he does not make 'I am' or 'I think, therefore I am' a foundation stone for knowledge.⁹ It was for him a sufficient reply to global skepticism, but not the basis for every other knowledge claim he thought he was entitled to make. .

Second, Augustine never seriously doubts the existence of "the external world." There is an intriguing passage in his *Contra academicos*, the earliest work of his that is extant, in which he considers withholding assent from the assumption that there is an independent physical world.¹² But this suggestion does not lead him to any further thoughts. And this idea seems to play no role at all in his later thought.

Augustine did try to face what I have called "the epistemological dream problem" ('How do I know whether I am *now* dreaming?'),¹³ but he seems not to have conceived "the metaphysical dream problem" ('How do I know that not everything is my dream?').¹⁴ Thus he didn't reason from the certainty of his own existence plus the possibility of there being no "external world" to the conclusion that the mind could exist in a completely disembodied state.

Augustine's concludes that mind (*mens*) – what I have called one's "core self" — is something whose nature it is to be only what it is certain that it is. This conclusion is, of course, the fruit of inquiry. But what is the nature of that inquiry, and how is an inquiry by the mind into the nature of mind possible?

As we have already seen, Augustine rejects the idea that the mind's search to know itself can be said to be directed by (a) partial knowledge, or (b) indirect knowledge, or by (c) knowledge by description. The mind, he thinks, is immediately available to itself, that is, the mind knows and recognizes itself as itself without having to use any kind of mediation – whether sense perception or sense image, or description.

Augustine already available a model of inquiry with which to understand the mind's inquiry into itself. It is the Perfection Model. Thus at the beginning of the inquiry into itself the mind already knows itself, but it wants to perfect its knowledge of itself. It must, however, resist the inclination to think of the imperfect knowledge that it already has of itself as partial knowledge. For that might lead it, wrongly, to suppose that it knows only a part of itself, whereas what is present to itself, without the mediation of the senses or any sort of representation, is itself as a whole.

The object of the mind's inquiry into itself can be successfully targeted by its realization that it is immediately present to itself and that it can recognize itself in, for example, knowing that *it* lives, that *it* thinks, and so on, without the mediation of sense perception, or of a memory image, or of any mental self-representation at all. Having targeted itself in this way as something immediately present to itself, it can come to realize, on reflection, that it cannot doubt that it lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges and that it is, therefore, a being that lives, remembers, understands, and so on. In coming to realize this it perfects its knowledge of itself.

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NOTES

1. *Confessions* 1.1.1.
2. Unless otherwise noted, translations of passages from the *De trinitate* are taken from Augustine, *On the Trinity: Books 8–15*, Gareth B. Matthews, ed., Stephen McKenna, trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, with only slight emendations.
3. In modern taxonomy, class.
4. I have departed significantly from the McKenna translation here in the perhaps vain hope of making Augustine's reasoning clearer.
5. Again, this translation departs significantly from the McKenna translation.
6. Lynne Baker has suggested to me the following analogy:
 - (1) I am present immediately and nonrepresentationally to myself.
 - (2) I am a person, who is essentially embodied.
 - (3) Persons essentially embodied are material objects.
 Therefore,
 - (4) A material object can be present immediately and nonrepresentationally to itself.

Augustine clearly rejects the conclusion of this argument. But then he rejects the first premise, unless it is taken, in Cartesian fashion, to be simply equiva-

lent to 'My mind is immediately and nonrepresentationally present to itself.' But if line (1) is taken that way, then line (2) becomes unacceptable for Augustine.

7. *Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections*, AT VII 246, CSM II 171.

8. *Meditation II*, AT VII 28, CSM II 19.

9. But compare G.E.M. Anscombe, "The First Person," *Mind and Language*, Samuel Guttenplan, ed., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 58.

10. The last line emends McKenna's translation.

11. See my *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992, especially Chapter 3 ("The Augustinian Cogito"), 29-38.

12. *Contra academicos* 3.11.24-25.

13. *Thought's Ego*, Chapter 5, 52-63.

14. *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, 64-73.